

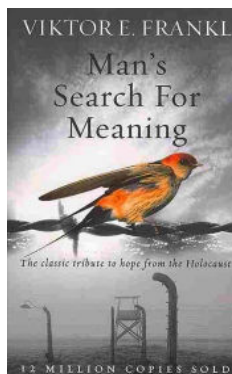


MAN'S SEARCH FOR MEANING

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THE BOOK



Man's Search for Meaning

By Viktor Frankl



INTRODUCTION

Since its initial publication in 1945, people have been moved and inspired by Psychiatrist and Holocaust Survivor Victor Frankl's extraordinary book, *Man's Search for Meaning*. As inspiring as it is heartbreaking, Frankl's matter-of-fact look at life in a Nazi concentration camp through the lens of his own lived experience will stay with you forever.

Rightfully considered a 20th-century classic, *Man's Search for Meaning* is a look at how finding meaning in your life can be the literal difference between life and death. Even in the most difficult circumstances imaginable, such as being a prisoner at Auschwitz, finding meaning can give you a reason to keep going and to strive to stay alive.

Man's Search for Meaning takes some of the darkest subject matter of modern history and turns it on its head to make it an inspirational tale of hope and strength. It is an essential book that should be on everyone's to-read list.



5 BEST QUOTES

"Don't aim at success. The more you aim at it and make it a target, the more you are going to miss it. For success, like happiness, cannot be pursued; it must ensue, and it only does so as the unintended side effect of one's personal dedication to a cause greater than oneself or as the by-product of one's surrender to a person other than oneself. Happiness must happen, and the same holds for success: you have to let it happen by not caring about it."

"When we are no longer able to change a situation, we are challenged to change ourselves."

"In some ways suffering ceases to be suffering at the moment it finds a meaning, such as the meaning of a sacrifice."

"Everyone has his own specific vocation or mission in life; everyone must carry out a concrete assignment that demands fulfillment. Therein he cannot be replaced, nor can his life be repeated. Thus, everyone's task is unique as is his specific opportunity to implement it."

"To be sure, man's search for meaning may arouse inner tension rather than inner equilibrium. However, precisely such tension is an indispensable prerequisite of mental health. There is nothing in the world, I venture to say, that would so effectively help one to survive even the worst conditions as the knowledge that there is a meaning in one's life."



8 BIG IDEAS

1. FRANKL'S STORY

The bulk of Man's Search for Meaning is an autobiographical telling of Viktor Frankl's experience as a Jewish prisoner in Nazi concentration camps, including Auschwitz, during the Second World War. The story itself will inspire your own search for meaning while providing perspective on your struggles. Told in a frank and matter-of-fact way, the struggles and horror of life in a concentration camp are tempered by Frankl's ability to see the positive and the beauty in life. From the beatings to the poor food to the horrifying conditions, Frankl describes it all and then how he was able to get through.

2. THE STAGES OF CAMP

Frankl outlines the three most significant stages for prisoners:

Shock This is the first stage that happens upon admission. The initial shock can also be accompanied by a morbid sense of humour and a strong sense of curiosity.

Apathy Once the inmate is accustomed to prison life and the shock has worn off, apathy sets in. When one is dehumanised and given no autonomy whatsoever, life starts to become meaningless, and prisoners stop caring about whether they live or die. Frankl says that when prisoners succumbed entirely to apathy, they often died soon afterwards.

Dissolution Perhaps the most tragic stage is the last that comes after release. At this stage, the former prisoner realises that freedom isn't the utopia that they were dreaming of in camp. This final stage can be dangerous, and more former prisoners than you may think took their own lives when freedom led to dissolution.

The second and third stages, in Frankl's view, were best handled by those who found some form of meaning that drove them and kept them going.

3. MEANING

The messages from Man's Search for Meaning can translate to the modern world and to people of all ages. As a psychiatrist, Frankl says that, while meaning can come in many forms, the search for some form of meaning is a key part of human existence. For himself, surviving Auschwitz, he found two specific forms of meaning that helped to keep him alive; his love for his wife and his desire to finish the manuscript that he had started before he was imprisoned.

4. LOGOTHERAPY

'Logotherapy' is Frankl's particular brand of psychology. The word derives from the Greek word, 'logos', denoting meaning, and logotherapy focuses on meaning and man's search for meaning. Frankl describes logotherapy as less retrospective and less introspective than psychoanalysis and more focused on the future. Or, more accurately, "On the meanings to be fulfilled by the patient in his future." The point of logotherapy is to confront the patient with and reorient them towards the meaning of their life.



8 BIG IDEAS

5. RESPONSIBLENESS

One of the aims of logotherapy is to make the patient fully aware of his own 'responsibility'.

Frankl asks his readers and patients to make their own decisions about for what, to what, or to whom they are responsible. He explains that when a patient is given the task of finding the true meaning of their life, this meaning is to be found externally and not within themselves.

6. THE MEANING OF SUFFERING

Logotherapy is also about never forgetting that there is meaning in life, even in the most hopeless situations.

Frankl cites the thought-provoking example of a patient who had lost his wife. He asked this patient, "What would have happened if you had died first, and your wife would have had to survive you?" The patient replied, "Oh, for her, this would have been terrible; how she would have suffered!" Frankl then said, "You see, such a suffering has been spared her, and it was you who have spared her this suffering—to be sure, at the price that now you have to survive and mourn her."

7. PARADOXICAL INTENTION

One of the key methods of logotherapy is the idea of paradoxical intentions.

Basically, the trick is to change your intentions to be the opposite of what you really want, in order to counter your neurosis. For instance, Frankl had a patient who was worried about excessive nervous sweating. Of course, the more anxious he became, the more he would sweat. Frankl taught him to change his thinking from "I hope I don't sweat too much" to "I'm going to show people how much I can sweat."

This paradoxical thinking helped him to switch his focus, and right away, his nervous sweating reduced.

8. PSYCHIATRY REHUMANIZED

Frankl believed that psychiatry tried for too long to interpret the mind as purely a mechanism and, by extension, therapy as merely a technique.

Frankl believed that a human being creates himself. He saw some people become 'swine' in the concentration camps and others become 'saints'. He believed that people have both possibilities within them but become one or the other based on their decisions.

**3 ACTION STEPS****1. UNDERSTAND THAT 'MEANING' DIFFERS FROM PERSON TO PERSON**

Meaning differs from person to person and even from day to day.

Meaning can change and fluctuate, but as long as you find the meaning that works for you, you will be able to move forward in life.

2. FIND YOUR RESPONSIBLENES

You are in charge of your own 'responsibleness'.

When you know who and what you are responsible for, you can begin to find your own sense of meaning.

3. REVERSE YOUR THINKING

Try Frankl's paradoxical thinking and embrace contradictory ideas as a way to combat anxiety and imposter syndrome.

**1 KEY TAKEAWAY**

The key takeaway of Man's Search for Meaning is that you can get through any situation if you can find the right reason.

"Those who have a 'why' to live, can bear with almost any 'how', as Friedrich Nietzsche said.

This is the crux of Frankl's writing. He espouses that meaning is essentially the sense of purpose that you use to drive you forward.

If Frankl and his fellow prisoners could find a way to survive one of the most horrific events in recent history by finding meaning, then the rest of us can get by, too, as long as we can find that meaning and purpose in our lives.



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Man's Search for Meaning

by Viktor E. Frankl

Frankl's account of surviving the camps and the case that meaning sustains us.

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